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ABSTRACT

The two papers presented in this document are intended to aid in the development of a comprehensive framework for standardizing objectives and levels of certification for foreign language learning in Europe. Specifically, these papers address the form in which foreign language achievement within such a framework could be reported, proposing a European Language Portfolio. The aims of such an instrument would be to enhance motivation for language learning; to enhance the recognition of language learning achievement through a single standardized record; and to enhance coherence in the educational systems and efficient interfaces between educational sectors. "A European Language Portfolio," (Rolf Scharer) discusses a proposed format of the portfolio, which would consist of the three district sections: the "passport," the "map," and the "dossier." The "passport" would be a record of formal qualifications in a language, while the "map" would be a representation of the individual's educational/achievement history in a language over time. Finally, the dossier would contain samples of the learner's work. "Options for Scales of Proficiency for a European Language Framework" (Brian North) discusses and compares various scale systems for classifying language ability. The advantages and disadvantages of natural levels are contrasted with those for pedagogical levels. (JL)

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Towards a Common European Framework for Reporting Language Competency

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Towards a Common European Framework for Reporting Language Competency

PREFACE

The two papers in this publication were the main input for the third and final phase of the Council of Europe Intergovernmental Symposium, "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Assessment, and Certification," held in Rüschlikon, Switzerland in November 1991, at which delegates from twenty-seven member states recommended the development of a comprehensive, flexible framework of reference for the definition of objectives and of levels for certification for language learning in Europe. The first phase of the symposium established the state of the art, the second looked at problems in defining objectives at advanced levels, and this third phase considered the form in which achievement within a common European framework might be reported, proposing a European Language Passport as part of a portfolio of achievement. The aims of such an instrument would be:

- to enhance and sustain motivation through longer term continuing education;
- to enhance the recognition of the language learning achievement of learners by employers and others by a single record with European currency;
- to enhance coherence in educational systems and efficient interfaces between educational sectors.

The symposium took place within the context of the Council of Europe Modern Languages Project, "Language Learning for European Citizenship," launched in 1989, and a full report on the proceedings will later be available from the Council of Europe Modern Languages Department. The symposium had its roots in developments during the 1970s which investigated the feasibility of a European unit/credit scheme for adult language learning in a series of three symposia at Rüschlikon, Switzerland (1971), at St. Wolfsgang, Austria (1973), and at Ludwigshafen, Germany (1977). The political and administrative contexts at that time were not conducive to the establishment of a unit/credit scheme in practice, and action moved instead to a series of pilot projects in which the principles upon which the proposed unit/credit scheme had been founded were applied to a wide range of educational situations. These developments were brought to a successful conclusion in 1981 and a new project was launched promoting the learning and teaching of languages for communication through a School Interaction Network and thirty-seven international workshops for teacher trainers. During this period, *The Threshold Level*, which had been intended to be one of a series of fixed reference points in a unit/credit scheme, was adapted for an increasing range of languages and the model for the specification of objectives adopted in *Threshold* was enriched by a series of studies culminating in a second version: *Threshold Level 1990* and *Waystage 1990*. *Waystage* is an objective halfway toward *Threshold*.

With the launch of the new project, "Language Learning for European Citizenship," at a symposium in Sintra, Portugal in 1989, the accelerating pace of political, social, and technical developments suggested that the time might be ripe to reexamine the question of a *common European framework*, left in abeyance since 1977. An offer by the Swiss authorities to host a second symposium at Rüschlikon was therefore accepted.

Phase 1 of the 1991 Rüschlikon symposium reviewed the state of the art on assessment and learning, including an overview of some of the recent technical developments which might feed into the development of a common framework:

- the English Speaking Union Framework Project, which compared the principal British examinations for English as a Foreign Language in terms of a common nine-point scale of proficiency;
- the Diplôme Elémentaire de Langue Française (DELF), a decentralized modular approach to a standard French diploma providing a framework within which countries could produce their own form of the examination;
- the English "Graded Objectives," schemes for foreign languages, which provided a series of small defined steps to motivate achievement at lower levels of proficiency, and the calibration system developed to compare them;
- the Swiss "Points de Rencontre," common objectives for the end of lower secondary school established by the twenty-six Swiss cantons.

A number of other international schemes were presented in an information fair, among them that of the International Certificate Conference, that of the Association of Language Teaching Examiners who are in the process of comparing examinations offered by institutes in different countries, and the European Certificate Project, which brings together several European universities.

After considering these technical innovations and the relationship between assessment and learning (Phase 1), the issues involved in the specification of objectives at higher levels (Phase 2), and the reporting of achievement through a common instrument (Phase 3), the symposium recommended:

- the establishment of a working group to elaborate a comprehensive, transparent, and coherent common European framework for the description of language learning at all levels which will enable learners to find their place and access their progress with reference to a set of defined reference points. The uses of the framework were seen to include the planning of language learning programs in terms of assumptions about earlier learning, and of objectives and content, the planning of language certification in terms of content of the syllabus and assessment criteria, and the planning of self-directed learning including awareness-raising, setting objectives, selecting suitable material, and self-assessment.
- the development, once the common framework has been elaborated, of a European Language Portfolio, a common instrument allowing individuals who so desire to maintain a record of the different elements of their language learning achievement and experience, formal or informal, with entries situated within the common framework where appropriate. The form of the language portfolio was seen to include a section in which formal qualifications were related to a common European scale (passport), another in which the learner could keep a record of other language learning experiences, and possibly a third containing examples of work done.

John Trim, Project Advisor and Rapporteur General.
Brian North, Symposium Coordinator.

A European Language Portfolio

ROLF SCHÄRER
Eurocentres Foundation, Zürich

INTRODUCTION

The idea of systematically recording learning progress and achievement is neither new nor revolutionary. The know-how and the skills to do this exist to a large degree in the teaching profession and in learning institutions. The concepts and tools developed in the context of the Modern Languages Project of the Council of Europe are now widely known and are having their impact in the language teaching world. Increased worldwide interdependence and the vision of a common European house demand a multilingual Europe and make effective communicative language skills for everyone more and more indispensable.

The time may have come for the actors in the language teaching field to pool their know-how, skills, and resources to create a tool for the individual learner enabling him or her to appreciate the value and benefits of lifelong language learning and to participate fully in the process.

It is proposed that the development of a European Language Portfolio could significantly help to motivate learners, to increase the coherence and transparency of the language learning process, and to value and reward achievement.

The European Language Portfolio, or *passport* as it was then called, was presented by Eurocentres to the second meeting of the Modern Languages Project Group in April 1990, with an example of how the group then thought it might look (Doc. CC-LANG. 90:6). The project group found the concept an ambitious and interesting one and asked Eurocentres to develop the idea for consideration at the symposium, "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Assessment, and Certification."

While the idea of a European Language Portfolio seems to appeal strongly to people's imagination, many issues need to be resolved before even the feasibility of a European Language Portfolio is firmly established. As a first step in this process, a small working group met in London in November 1990 to scrutinize the concept.

What follows are thoughts and suggestions, taking account of the work and insight of the group which met in London and of many suggestions received in the meantime. These suggestions might either be developed, amended, or rejected; they are offered as a basis for discussion on the feasibility of a European Language Portfolio and, should a common will develop, to help establish what further steps need to be taken.

AN OUTLINE OF A PROPOSED EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

The working group in London felt that a European Language Portfolio would probably need to have three distinct sections:

The names given might still need discussion and revision, yet they will be used as provisional labels in this paper.

The *passport* would record formal qualifications attained, hurdles passed on a specific date in a formal summative examination, or other achievements of similar status which allow students to enter higher education or a profession.

A high degree of objectivity of the tools used and in reporting results would be expected.

This section could form the basis for formal recognition of achievements across school systems and national borders provided agreement on a common framework of reference can be reached.

Key questions as yet unanswered:

1. Credibility: Who would be authorized to make entries? What kind of entries?
2. Upon what basis can a common framework be established, within which examinations and diplomas can be compared? Are there "natural levels" which could be agreed to form the basis for such a framework?
3. What information should be given (beyond pass/fail)?

The *map(s)* would enable learners and teachers to pinpoint a position reached in the learning process at a given time, to reflect on the efforts made, to select future goals, and to trace paths leading there.

The map(s) in the language portfolio would serve a similar function to those served by geographical maps: it would provide an overview at all times; it would allow reference points to be established; it would help to keep records of past "adventures"; it would help plan new ones; and it would allow decisions to be made on further efforts needed to reach yet higher goals.

Depending on their purpose and their audience, geographical maps come in all shapes and sizes, scales, colors, and graphic conventions, yet they always seem to be based on an underlying agreement which makes them understandable and useful to a wide range of users.

Diversity in the language learning field, in evaluation procedures, and in conventions for recording results is a fact of life and probably even a source of enrichment on which we would be wise to build. What we might need to develop, however, is a convention for "true north" and a commonly shared system of *gridlines* with reference to which everybody could place statements in the language map.

As with geographical maps, experts could deduce a wealth of information, yet the nonspecialist user, the learner, could also get valuable information and, above all, a sense of direction.

Using a gridline framework covering different types of descriptions would make it possible to adjust language learning goals to reality, taking account of limited resources, and to recognize the validity of partial achievements.

Key questions as yet unanswered:

1. Simplicity? How can a map be made simple, yet comprehensive enough to be relevant, valid, and reliable?
2. What language needs to be used to make statements understandable to the different user groups?
3. Are there key elements which should always be included in map statements?

The *dossier* is the place for the learner to keep samples of his or her work (for example, corrected papers), overviews and records from programs followed (for example, a general outline of goals, content, and levels of school curricula), and descriptions of evaluation procedures and assessment criteria.

This section would provide background material for further planning, and hence its content would change dramatically over time as what was once relevant was superceded by new samples, records, and achievements.

Key questions as yet unanswered:

1. User-friendliness? What should be collected? What for? For how long?
2. Selection of samples? Representativeness? Validity?
3. Could teachers or schools be asked to provide corrected work together with assessment criteria?

To summarize, the language portfolio should serve to stimulate the learning of languages throughout life by giving value to language skills in all (European) languages and by demonstrating the payoff of all language learning, in both formal and informal learning environments. Since it highlights achievements and involves learners in building new learning on old learning, it should help make the overall process of learning appear more relevant, coherent, and economical, and thus motivate further effort. Since the results would be related to a shared framework of reference, the portfolio would help harmonize the recognition and reporting of achievement in a multilingual Europe.

Key questions as yet unanswered:

1. User-friendliness? What effort and training would a learner need to use his or her language portfolio effectively?
2. Cost-effectiveness? Will there be sufficient positive impact on learning of languages and/or other educational goals in relation to efforts and resources needed to make a European Language Portfolio work?
3. Is there a shared will to embark on such a venture involving very differing professional partners in the field and millions of learners?
4. What is the minimum of elements to be ready for a start? What more should be developed, over what time?
5. Is the vision of a European Language Portfolio worthwhile even though the realization will most likely never be perfect?
6. Who is the owner of the language portfolio? The learner only?
7. How could a European Language Portfolio effectively help coordination between differing school systems?
8. How could a European Language Portfolio help to solve problems created by higher mobility throughout language areas, teaching institutions, and professions by allowing recognition and transferability of results and achievements?
9. How could a language portfolio help learners to realize their language learning potential better?

Target Groups

As a European Language Portfolio could play an important role in coordinating efforts among a set of different actors, it might be useful to consider what interest the following groups might share in such a development.

The learner. His or her development and achievement is at the center of all considerations. The goal is for him or her to be involved in the design and running

of the process, to have a clear view of where he or she stands and what he or she is aiming toward, and to have achievements highlighted and valued.

The teacher. He or she could find it desirable to have end-of-course objectives clearly stated at the outset and to be aware of students' previous experiences, programs, and achievements. All this could help to conceive and run programs better. Explicit information and stated objectives could on the other hand bring complications and create pressure in running classes. Collecting information and helping students to understand it could cause an undue additional workload.

The teaching institution. The institutions could find it desirable to state the services on offer, the goals strived for, and the contributions made. To be able to link programs offered to the previous experience and achievement of students could help to plan relevant objectives and activities and to use resources effectively. There could develop added pressure on teachers and teaching institutions to be accountable to learners and society, and to make information openly available. This may lay open the teaching institutions and teachers to criticism, both justified and unjustified; the use of scarce resources needs to be justified.

The testing institutions. Summative evaluation could take an even more important role in relation to a commonly accepted and shared overall framework. Formative evaluation will however occupy the central place during a particular language learning program and the relationship between the two types of evaluation will need to be looked at more closely.

The employers and other "buyers" of language skills. An agreed framework could help to put a value on the knowledge and skills acquired. Employers and other buyers of language skills might be encouraged to declare their requirements and the value attached to achievements in relation to this agreed framework.

Society (often represented by ministries of education). A European Language Portfolio could help to make clear the value of language skills to a community and, as a consequence, make available the resources necessary to achieve success in this area. The sharing of responsibility and of services among different teaching institutions could be helped and economy of scale more easily achieved; accountability for resources used could be increased; and the accreditation of foreign study courses and diplomas could be eased and facilitated.

Key questions as yet unanswered:

1. Is it feasible to find forms of expression which can be understood by all those who share an interest in the language portfolio, yet require information for varying purposes?
2. Is it feasible to chart progress reliably through a series of successive entries made at different points in the learning process by different people?
3. How much and what information would be needed, when, and by whom?

A FAMILY OF TOOLS

The working group in London felt that shared tools would need to be developed.

A Series of Levels

There seem to be good reasons for quite different level systems. The notion of broad "natural levels"—points in learning and level of competence which are clearly discernible and where generally wide agreement between professionals exists—seems to hold the hope that broad agreement of a general calibration framework could be achieved.

Narrower teaching or "pedagogic levels" on the other hand seem to relate to institutions and to many different settings and therefore seem to have to differ widely.

Global competence levels and levels for discrete skills, especially for nonlinguistic skills are related but need not be identical.

There seems to be some hope that these different systems might be calibrated in some way to a common system of broad "natural levels."

Descriptors

The working group in London felt that the passport and the map should use related descriptors for each relevant domain or level. Brian North (this publication) will present and invite an examination of some considerations related to the development of descriptors in "Options for Scales of Proficiency for a European Language Framework."

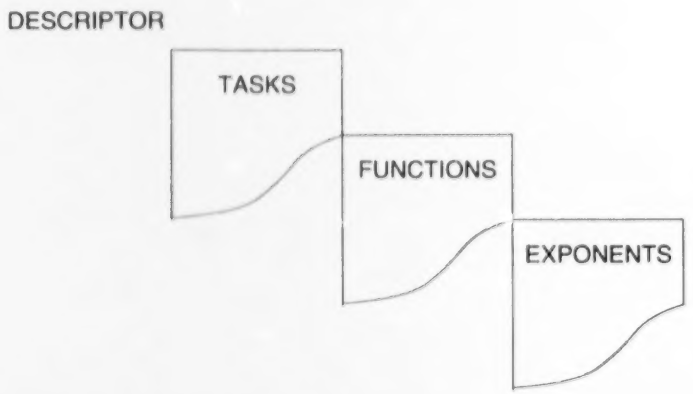
Reference Manual

The learner language portfolio could be supported by a reference manual which could be organized in a way which mirrors the organization of the language portfolio itself (passport, map, and dossier).

- A *passport catalogue* could offer charts showing how different qualifications are placed in the language portfolio framework and giving brief details on them. This would be of interest to employers as well as teaching institutions.
- A *reference map* could contain the portfolio map itself plus an analysis of objectives and content specifications related to the scale descriptors, which teachers and teaching institutions could use to chart the objectives and specifications of their programs.

This analysis could be undertaken in an independent, decentralized way, using a method of analysis appropriate to the learning institution concerned. The reference map for a particular teaching institution would normally become more comprehensive over time as a source for future planning and coordination.

Eurocentres, for example, is currently experimenting with a task-based analysis:



For ease of access to such an elaborate system, the use of computers would be advantageous, not only to help institutions with syllabus and program planning, but also as a way of opening up the whole system to the learner.

- A *reference dossier* could contain samples of performance for the different portfolio levels.

Evaluation Tools and Instruments

A wide range of evaluation tools and instruments are already available, yet further development is necessary.

The field of learner self-evaluation will without any doubt need specific attention.

SUMMARY

There is the practical question of whether all or at least a major part of such a system of interlinked descriptors would have to be in place before a European Language Portfolio could be launched into the field.

On the other hand, could a language portfolio divided into passport, map(s), and dossier offer the potential for an early start with gradual development and perfection of the system? Taking into account the state of the art, the know-how, and skills in the teaching profession, such an early start might well be possible. Some tentative understanding on who would make what entries, what goes where, and a broad agreement on possible descriptors might be needed.

The idea of a European Language Portfolio contains the dream that the language teaching world will pool its resources and its know-how and will be willing and able to excel in the interest of the language learners throughout Europe, young and old, so that learning a language will be a truly rewarding experience for each individual.

As with every dream it needs action for it to become true and a realization that, however well the dream is realized, the result will never be perfect.

The baseline question is: Should we try?

Options for Scales of Proficiency for a European Language Framework

BRIAN NORTH
Eurocentres, Zürich

Outlining the framework of reference for the definition of objectives and of levels of certification for language learning in Europe, John Trim used the crucial phrase: "a coherent and transparent system which will enable learners to find their place and assess their progress in relation to certain well-defined reference points" (Trim, forthcoming).

If learners are to be able to find their place in the system, this implies that they will be able to understand the description of the system given to them, which means that this description will need to be relatively simple. If they are going to assess their progress, there is a need for enough levels for them to be able to see change over time. Finally, if there are going to be certain defined reference points, two issues present themselves: the number of such points, and whether a series of defined reference points implies a scale.

In talking about the European Language Portfolio as a means of charting learner achievement inside a common framework, Rolf Schärer used the metaphor of a geographic map and mentioned the possible need for a common set of gridlines. In a language learning context, the two axes making up such a map/grid would be "level" (vertical) and "skills" or "domains" (horizontal). Whereas the vertical axis, level, *could* be represented just by a thermometer scale of scores (for example, 1–1,000), the horizontal axis implies describing different aspects of competence, a network of subscales of descriptions of what people can do in different areas at different levels.

Whether or not to develop or adopt such a scale (or a network of subscales) is a fundamental decision. The advantage of a scale would be that test scores, exam grades, school-leaving statements, and self-assessments could be reported in terms of the same definitions, summarizing learner performance in the area of the level concerned. The descriptions on the scale could be used as reference points firstly to clarify the relationships between qualifications (as with the English Speaking Union Framework Project) and secondly to provide learners and institutions with a set of defined milestones to chart learning routes—to find their place and assess progress.

Since the question of whether to have a scale is fundamental, it seemed sensible to undertake a preliminary investigation of what kind of scale the application of the principles we have been talking about might lead to in practice. This paper seeks to provide such a review as input to the discussion.

In preparation for the symposium, "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, and Certification," a number of points have been made concerning the basic design criteria for a possible *scale of levels*. That it should:

- be developed through wide cooperation between partners in the field if it is to gain acceptability. In many respects the networks established in the process of the development are as important as the final product.

- be a simple, straightforward, rugged, reasonably reliable calibration system of minimum complexity; a workable tool, not a theoretical construct.
- be flexible, supportive, learner-centered, decentralized; a means to stimulate innovation rather than act as a brake upon it.
- have enough levels for learners to see progress to stimulate motivation, and for low-level attainment to be credited.
- provide a profile across at least the four skills.
- be user-friendly: readable and written in terms of what learners can do (outcome-based).
- provide some direct relation to specifications for objectives.

This is a collation of comments that has been made and while it contains some contradictions, it is nevertheless a useful starting point. From the point of view of the design of the scale of proficiency itself, these concerns raise three key issues:

- the number of *levels* (more to see progress, fewer to calibrate simply and reliably),
- the *skills and domains* (more to profile diversity, fewer to keep it usable),
- the *definition style* (complex enough to describe different aspects, simple enough for learners to understand).

It is these three issues that Eurocentres has been investigating. Models for two alternative versions of a possible scale have been prepared as part of the process and are provided in the appendices. It should be stressed that these models were produced purely as an illustration to provide a concrete starting point for discussion. They inevitably reflect the Eurocentres house style and are in no way intended to be definitive drafts for an actual system.

LEVELS

Over the years people have produced scales going from zero to native speaker proficiency with 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 levels in addition to partial scales which cover less ground with more levels to show progress. The original scale of proficiency, the United States Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale developed in the 1950s and now called the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale, has five levels originally designed to establish whether or not a candidate had a sufficient language level for a diplomatic or intelligence mission. The system is product-oriented, interested in results, with a bias to high levels of proficiency. An attempt to produce a framework for modern languages in the United Kingdom recently proposed six levels; Wilkins (1978) provided detailed definitions for the seven levels that he said could be readily identified; the English Language Teaching Development Unit (ELTDU) Stages of Attainment Scale (late 1970s) has eight clearly defined levels from A to H; and the ESU Framework Scale, starting from Wilkins' seven levels, settled for nine levels like the British Council/University of Cambridge International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) scale. A rough, preliminary, subjective calibration of these scales, plus two partial scales from the UK National Curriculum and from Eurocentres, is given in Diagram 1.

The argument for a nine-point scale for a "scale of scales" is strong. It has what can technically be called integrity: it is neutral, and unlike many scales it is not related to any particular population or any particular purpose, and is therefore flexible to new circumstances. Thus, if in twenty years' time it were decided that fifty percent of the population should be able to speak Japanese up to point 2 on a nine-point scale, (roughly *Waystage*) there is a way of describing

DIAGRAM 1

APPROXIMATE EQUIVALENCES OF SCALES OF PROFICIENCY:
A Preliminary, Subjective Calibration.

		ESU 9 Level	ELTDU 8 Level	Wilkins 7 Level	FSI/ILR 5 Level	Euro-centres	National Curric.
		9	H	7 Ambi-lingual	5		
		8	G	6 Compr. Mastery	4		
Upper Secondary Achievement ?	NIVEAU 3 ?	7	F	5 Effective Profic.	3	(10)	
		6	E		2+	9	
				4 Adequate Response		8	10
		5	D		2	7	9
						6	8
	Threshold Level	4	C	3 Threshold	1+	5	7
							6
		3	B		1	4	5
				2 Waystage		3	4
	Waystage	2	A		0+	2	3
				1 Survival		1	2
		1	0	0	0	0	1
							0

the objective, and a milestone on the way to it; whereas if one had adopted a five-point scale, one would have to say that 50 percent of the population should learn Japanese up to point 0+, which is not very transparent or motivating.

A nine-point scale, then, has a reasonable number of levels to show progress, and it has been demonstrated that it can be used for assessment (IELTS) and for comparing examinations (ESU). One can also take the relevant section of an overall nine-point scale for a particular purpose, as the Association of Language Teaching Examiners (ALTE) Group has shown with its comparison of qualifications from examining boards. They have taken the middle five levels (3-7) of a notional nine-point scale, because that is where the significant examinations are. A nine-point scale is a sensible compromise, but, as is the nature of compromises, it may not actually give people what they want. Alternatives exist and in discussing them we have come to use the phrases "natural levels" and "pedagogic levels."

Natural Levels

These are not connected with nature, they are the conventional, recognized, convenient levels found in books and exams. *Threshold* is a good example of a "natural level." There may be some difficulty in saying exactly where it is (since *Threshold* is a set of content specifications rather than performance criteria), but people have a pretty good idea. *Waystage* or "survival" precede *Threshold*, something variously described as "competent use," "independence," or "autonomous use" (sometimes called *Niveau 3*) appears to follow it, and the level at which one can attend a university course in the humanities, the level of exams like Cambridge Proficiency, Göethe Kleines Deutsches Sprach-Diplom, Diplôme Elémentaire de Langue Française, seems to be a fourth level, presumably with an area approaching bilingualism beyond that.

The advantage of a set of five or so such broadly-based so-called "natural levels" is that with broader levels it is relatively easy to agree on equivalences. One is not being too precise and is not making too many decisions; therefore, the results of those relatively crude decisions are rugged and reliable.

The main disadvantage is that, as with the original 1950s five-point FSI scale, the emphasis is on the *products* of the success of the few (qualifications) rather than encouraging the *process* of successful learning by the many. It would seem to me to be odd for an organization concerned with the promotion of learning and the development of European citizenship to set up a scheme in which a very large proportion of the people involved never get beyond point 1.

Pedagogic Levels

Pedagogic levels are narrower levels aiming to provide objectives and motivation for a particular population during the learning process itself. They only cover the relevant range of proficiency of that population. The UK Graded Objectives schemes and National Curriculum are classic examples; the Eurocentre scale is another.

The advantage of using narrower levels in a language portfolio would be that the learner would make *visible* motivating progress. The UK Graded Objectives schemes have sets of little levels one can climb through quickly, collect, and feel good about.

The disadvantages of using them for a European framework for establishing equivalences between qualifications could be twofold. First, more detailed level systems seem to bunch in different ways reflecting the particular learning population concerned. People may find it difficult to relate standard, rather narrow levels to their own rather narrow levels, and therefore it could be difficult for any one

scheme to gain acceptance. Second, the fact that the distinctions are finer makes it more difficult to develop adequate descriptors, unambiguous samples, and thus harder to achieve consistent interpretation in different contexts in thirty countries.

Options for Levels

This tension between wanting more levels to motivate and fewer levels to establish equivalences to some extent determines the options available for levels. Central questions are whether it is advisable to have a single framework scale or whether there could be twin scales which measure in different but related units. Fewer, more reliable "natural levels" are required for the product-oriented passport, whereas the more motivating pedagogic levels are assigned to the process-oriented map. Having common "well-defined reference points" does not necessarily imply everybody using the same scale for all purposes. Provided that the common (passport) reference points appear on all the scales, map scales could have intermediate points as well and different sectors, regions, or organizations could even use different maps.

Option A: A classic neutral nine-point scale like the ESU.

Option B: A compromise nine-point scale adding one or two extra lower levels and stopping below bilingualism.

Option C: Twin scales:
Passport: Common five- or nine-point scale.
Map: Two or three map levels equal one passport level.

Diagram 2 shows the kind of equivalences which can be provided by a nine-point scale, allowing the use of + levels as in the ESU framework. (Option A)

Diagram 3 shows three contrasted nine-point scales (ESU, IELTS, Eurocentres) and a compromise nine-point scale derived from them. Notice the finer distinctions around *Threshold* level.

Diagram 4 shows a possible five-point passport scale (actually, like ALTE, the five middle points of a nine-point scale) contrasted to a more detailed map scale.

SKILLS AND DOMAINS

The familiarity and convenience of the division between global proficiency and the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) make this a sensible starting point. Such a familiar division would be clear to learners and the ESU project has shown that examinations can be compared in this way. The Version A model (see page 22) uses this format. But the ESU experience also suggests that defining the four skills for three domains (work, study, general) could give a rather cumbersome set of about seventeen scales organized in a hierarchical pyramid with very repetitive wording which still does not directly relate to any real world tasks with which a learner may identify.

DIAGRAM 2: OPTION A: Classic Nine-Point Scale

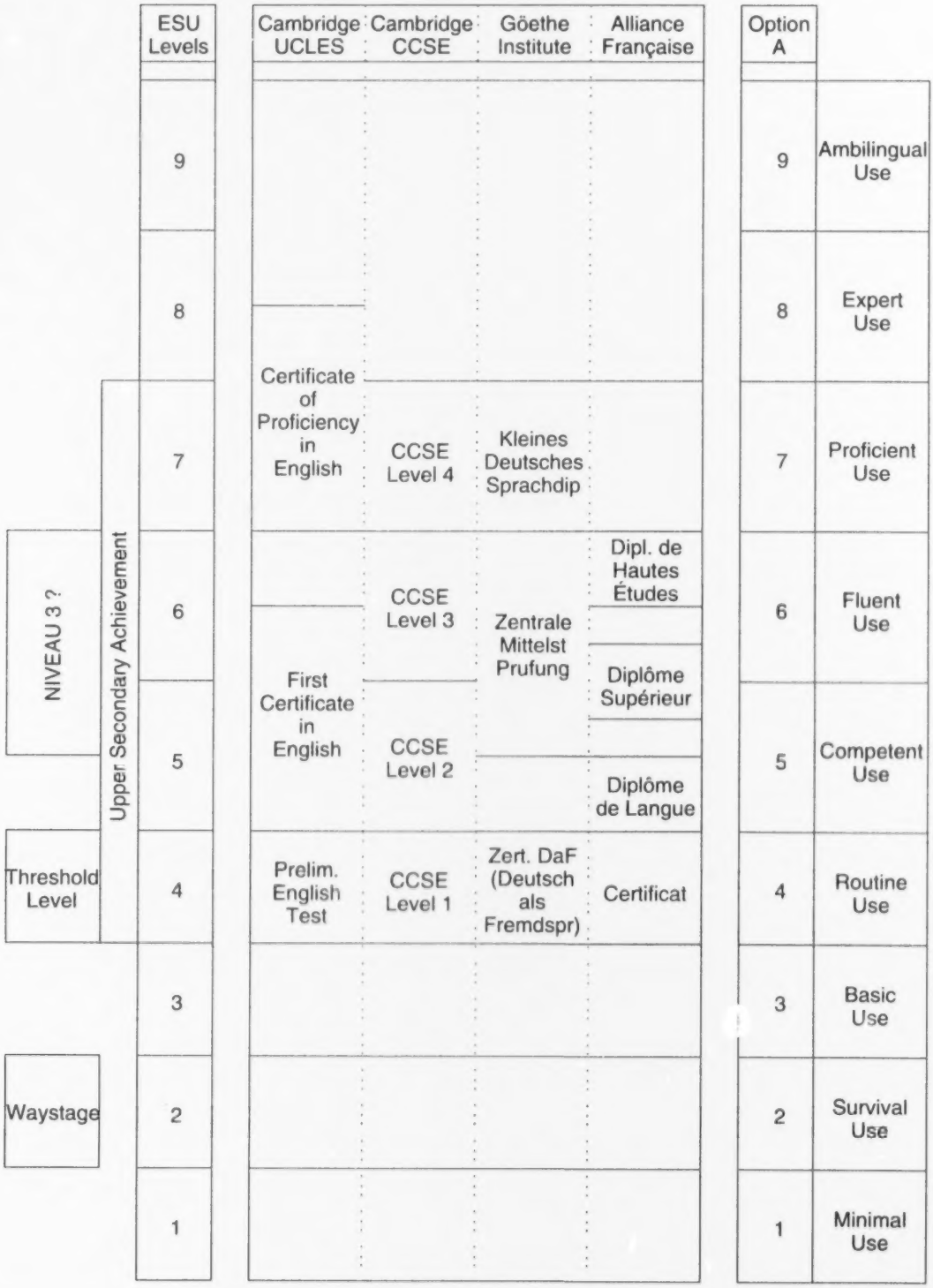


DIAGRAM 3: OPTION B: Compromise Nine-Point Scale.

DIAGRAM 4:

Possible Twin Scales

<table>
<tr><th>Cambridge UCLES</th><th>Göethe Institute</th><th>Alliance Française</th><th>Passport (ALTE)</th><th>MAP (Eurocentre)</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Certificate of Proficiency in English</td><td>Kleines Deutsches Sprachdip</td><td></td><td>V</td><td>12</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td rowspan="3">Zentrale Mittelst. Prufung</td><td>Dipl. de Hautes Études</td><td rowspan="2">IV</td><td>11</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">First Certificate in English</td><td>Diplôme Supérieur</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td rowspan="2">III</td><td>9</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Diplôme de Langue</td><td>8</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Prelim. English Test</td><td rowspan="2">Zert. DaF (Deutsch als Fremdspr)</td><td rowspan="2">Certificat</td><td rowspan="2">II</td><td>7</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="3">I</td><td>5</td></tr>
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</table>

An alternative model might be to omit the global scale and focus on what various writers have seen as the three main aspects of language use: understanding (one-way, receptive), interacting (two-way, live), and prepared production (one-way, productive). These themselves could be subdivided pragmatically into main fields of activity learners might recognize that they engage in, whatever domain they are concerned with, as in Version B (see also pages 23–26):

Comprehension	Oral Interaction	Production
Viewing Listening Reading	Conversation Telephone Meetings	Letters Reports Presentations

This is not to suggest that these nine fields are a definitive set, but rather that taking "language activity," instead of skills, as the organizing principle of the domains could be an alternative that corresponds more closely to real use and could aid harmonization between a system for "General Language," and one for "Language for Specific Purposes."

A division among three aspects of language use *(comprehension, interaction, production)* could also encourage the development of limited objectives leading to what have been described as *partial qualifications.* In the first foreign language, one might cover all three areas, in the second only comprehension and interaction, and in the third only comprehension, on the principle that in a multilingual Europe of the future people might need to understand information and opinions expressed in what are called "lesser taught languages," as well as have an active command of a lingua franca. One might need to be able to interact socially in a couple of foreign languages while only needing to use one for formal expression (production).

Enabling Skills

Scales for enabling skills might well need to be added to those for language use (whether organized by skill or activity). Three areas for scales which have been suggested are *strategic competence, knowledge of language system,* and *knowledge of target culture* and it would be possible for these to be subdivided. Formulating such scales in a way that will mean something to a nonspecialist may, however, present a considerable challenge.

DEFINITION STYLE

Scales vary in their purpose and audience and in the degree of detail which they give. Alderson has identified three types according to function: *constructor-oriented* for syllabus, material, and test writers; *assessor-oriented* for use in direct assessment, and *user-oriented* for reporting results to nonspecialist clients (Alderson 1991). It is with user-oriented scales that we are concerned in connection with the European Language Portfolio.

User-oriented or reporting scales can be simpler than the other two types, and sometimes combine qualitative labels like "competent," "effective," or "adequate" with contextual generalizations like "most everyday situations" or "routine professional contexts." As Trim has pointed out, such generalizations can command an apparent acceptance precisely because they are capable of an infinite number of often contradictory interpretations, and it is impossible to relate them to specifications for content (Trim 1978). To counter this problem, quantitative detail could be added from a constructor-oriented source in terms of tasks the

learner should be able to do at the level concerned, and qualitative detail could be added from an assessor-oriented source in terms of criteria for an acceptable performance at that level. There are problems, however, attached to either approach used to give more substance to the definitions, complicated by the interaction between the two sources of detail and the fundamental design decision in writing descriptors: to be systematic and comprehensive or to be selective.

A "Systematic" Approach

Van Ek (1987) discusses the systematic inclusion of the same elements in the definition for each level of a scale. The problem with such an approach from the point of view of a learner-oriented system is that it can lead to repetition and to the forced definition of distinctions which cannot easily be captured in words, with the result that adjacent definitions can appear at first sight to be virtually identical to the nonspecialist reader and the whole scale can make one's head spin. The ESU descriptors follow a systematic pattern compressing statements from a set of assessor-oriented criteria defined for each level into an overall level descriptor. The following first lines from adjacent descriptors for *speaking* demonstrate the problem:

> Handles moderate speech situations with good confidence and competence, but some problems with higher level situations.
>
> Handles moderate speech situations with adequate confidence and competence.
>
> Handles simple speech situations with good confidence and competence, but some problems with moderate level situations.
>
> Handles simple speech situations with adequate confidence and competence, but some problems with moderate level situations.

An actual descriptor is made up of about eight such phrases:

> Handles moderate speech situations with adequate confidence and competence. Message is broadly conveyed, but with little subtlety and some loss of detail. Some difficulties in initiating and sustaining conversation. Interaction needs repetition and clarification. Spoken text organization is adequate but with fairly frequent stylistic lapses. Fairly frequent hesitations and lapses in fluency, but these do not interfere with basic communication. Uses a moderate language repertoire, but has to search for words and use circumlocutions. Fairly frequent errors in accuracy. Obvious L1 accent and speech features. Limitations impair communication at times.

The result may make sense to insiders concerned with assessment, but it lacks a certain transparency. Another problem with descriptors at this amount of detail is that the detail may not apply to each learner. Further, it is difficult to link this kind of information to objectives.

A Selective Approach

An alternative is the task approach pioneered by ELTDU, selecting "key tasks"—things that are strikingly new that the learner can now do at the level concerned. One problem with this approach, however, is that the decisions about which levels to place particular tasks could be due to convention rather than empirical evidence; the descriptors could be clichés. Another problem is that, unless one is careful with the wording, statements in a reporting instrument that people at this level can "do" a particular task could set up the expectation that they were seen to do it, that is to say, that they were assessed on all the tasks mentioned.

On the other hand, task-based statements, following a pattern "can do this in those situations most of the time provided that . . . ," offer the kind of transparency we are looking for, and can provide a link to specifications for objectives through an analysis of the tasks included and of the quality of performance implied.

A Compromise

There is thus no simple answer to the development of level descriptors. We want to describe something complex in simple terms that learners will understand, but, thinking of tabloid journalism, how simplistically can one report complex issues before one has unjustifiably distorted the message? It is a problem that requires careful thought and, above all, cooperation. The approach taken in the models has been to expand the simpler type of "situational" definition with selected qualitative and quantitative detail. They are early drafts, from a particular stable, but hopefully they demonstrate that it is possible to write something that will be more meaningful to learners than a set of numbers.

CONCLUSION

As Rolf Schärer explained, a learner-oriented European Language Portfolio could be backed up by a reference manual with samples and by more detailed specifications for the derivation of course objectives, the latter perhaps for broadly-based "natural levels" like *Threshold*. With this backup information available, the descriptions in the scales could perhaps err on the side of brevity, so as to be more readable, and to be able to fit a scale on a single page.

None of these technical decisions about levels, domains, or style needs to be made now. The aim of this paper has been to try and give at least a provisional answer to the question: "What might a scale look like if we decided we wanted one?" so that a decision in principle can perhaps be taken on whether to develop one. I hope that it has also indicated some of the issues which will need to be addressed in the process of doing so.

SCALES OF PROFICIENCY—STYLES

Definitions for the midpoint of a notional nine-point scale.

A: Contextual generalizations

> **Speaking:** Can express himself accurately in everyday situations and conversations.

Eurocentre "Statement of Achievement" 1978

B: Task-based

> **Meetings:** Can take part in meetings where the discussion is limited to the exchange of information, making arrangements of planning ahead *provided* the majority of participants are also nonnative speakers *but* is slow and inaccurate and cannot talk for any length of time on a subject. His lack of polite speech formulae might create a bad impression on native speakers.

ELTDU "Stages of Attainment Scale" late 1970s

C: Criteria-based

> **Speaking:** Handles moderate speech situations with adequate confidence and competence. Message is broadly conveyed, but with little subtlety and some loss of detail. Some difficulties in initiating and sustaining conversation. Interaction needs repetition and clarification. Spoken text organization is adequate but with fairly frequent stylistic lapses. Fairly frequent hesitations and lapses in fluency, but these do not interfere with basic communication. Uses a moderate language repertoire, but has to search for words and use circumlocutions. Fairly frequent errors in accuracy. Obvious L1 accent and speech features. Limitations impair communication at times.

ESU Framework 1989

D: Compromise:

> **Speaking:** Can express herself on a range of topics of interest, able to take an active part in discussion and intervene to present a viewpoint. Can generally find ways of saying what she wants to, even though she may sometimes be less easy to follow in more complex specialized settings. She can check and report information reliably, give detailed descriptions and accounts of experiences and opinions, start, end and avoid conversation politely, and can express emotional responses.

Mock-up Version A: condensed from Eurocentre draft certificate.

REFERENCES

Scales:

ALTE: Association of Language Teaching Examiners, including Cambridge, Perugia, Lisbon, Göethe Institut, Alliance Française, Spanish Education Ministry and University of Salamanca, and the Generalitat de Catalunya.

ESU (English Speaking Union) Framework: *ESU Framework*, Carroll, B.J & West, R. Longman 1989.

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Alderson, J.C. Bands and Scores, in *Language Testing in the 1990s*, ed. Alderson J.C & North B. Macmillan 1991.

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Trim, J.L.M. General Orientation Note to the 1991 Council of Europe symposium "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, Certification."

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EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO SCALE—
SECOND DRAFT

VERSION A

Global

Listening
Reading
Speaking
Writing

The draft for Level 5 for global proficiency and the four skills is presented.

A third layer of the four skills in three domains could follow, as with the ESU Framework. The three domains are: Social and Personal, Business, Study/ Training.

A fourth layer of enabling skills could be added: Knowledge of the Language System, Knowledge of the Target Culture, Strategic Competence.

GLOBAL:

5. Can understand unsimplified language on topics of interest to her and exchange information reliably. Can generally find ways of formulating what she wants to express. Can communicate competently and independently in many professional as well as personal contexts.

Listening:

5. Can understand what is said to her and follow much of what is said in conversation and discussion around her. Can understand most talks and recorded or broadcast material like news programs, documentaries, and training films delivered in clear standard input. Can follow dubbed films, and other films with a straightforward clear dialogue with little difficulty.

Reading:

5. Can understand the information content of various kinds of written input on a range of subjects, identifying the essential information and line of argument, and rereading, working out the meaning of particularly difficult sections with a dictionary.

Speaking:

5. Can express herself on a range of topics of interest, able to take an active part in discussion and intervene to present a viewpoint. She can generally find ways of saying what she wants to, even though she may sometimes be less easy to follow in more complex specialized settings. She can check and report information reliably, give detailed descriptions and accounts of experiences and opinions, start, end and avoid conversation politely, and can express emotional responses.

Writing:

5. Can write clearly on a range of subjects following standard conventions and paragraphing. The reader has little difficulty following. Can write detailed descriptions, narratives, and short essays on a range of subjects. Can write simple formal letters giving factual information and personal letters asking for, giving, and responding to news.

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO SCALE—
SECOND DRAFT

VERSION B

Comprehension	Interaction	Production
Viewing Listening Reading	Conversation Telephoning Meetings	Letters Reports Presentations

Level 5 for the three Layer 1 scales is presented here.

The following pages repeat a Layer 1 definition with the corresponding Layer 2 descriptors for Level 5.

A third layer of enabling skills could be added: Knowledge of the Language System, Knowledge of the Target Culture, Strategic Competence.

COMPREHENSION:

5. Can understand the general information content in various kinds of straightforward unsimplified input. Can identify the essential information and line of argument on subjects of particular interest.

INTERACTION:

5. Can understand what is said directly to her and follow much of what is said in conversation and discussion around her. Can express herself on a range of topics of interest, generally finding ways of saying what she wants to, though she may sometimes be less easy to follow in more complex specialized settings. Can interact competently over a meal.

PRODUCTION:

5. Can prepare clear text on a range of subjects, which uses standard conventions, and is relatively easy to follow.

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO SCALE—
SECOND DRAFT

VERSION B

COMPREHENSION:

5. Can understand the general information content in various kinds of straightforward unsimplified input. Can identify the essential information and line of argument on subjects of particular interest.

Viewing:

5. Can understand most news programs, documentaries, and training films with a spoken commentary. Can follow dubbed films with little difficulty, and can follow the general outline of most other TV programs, apart from realistic drama and very informal street interviews.

Listening:

5. Can follow much of the discussion around her and understand the information content of most talks and recorded material delivered in clear standard input.

Reading:

5. Can understand the information content of various kinds of written input on a range of subjects, rereading to work out the meaning of particularly difficult sections with a dictionary.

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO SCALE—
SECOND DRAFT

VERSION B

INTERACTION:

5. Can understand what is said directly to her and follow much of what is said in conversation and discussion around her. Can express herself on a range of topics of interest, generally finding ways of saying what she wants to, though she may sometimes be less easy to follow in more complex specialized settings. Can interact competently over a meal.

Conversation:

5. Can keep up with a conversation on a topic of interest, and can initiate or avoid conversation politely in most contexts. She can check and pass on information reliably, give detailed descriptions of opinions, plans, and experiences, and express emotional responses.

Meetings:

5. Can take an active part in discussion on a range of topics of interest, keeping in touch with the main points and intervening to present a viewpoint, provided there is some tolerance towards lack of fluency and unconventional expression. Can report information reliably.

Telephoning:

5. Can use the telephone comfortably for routine purposes with familiar people, or counterparts in the same organization. Can cope with complications when booking a hotel, et cetera. Can understand, make notes on, and take detailed messages provided the other caller makes allowances for comprehension difficulties, and it is possible to confirm the main points.

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO SCALE—
SECOND DRAFT

VERSION B

PRODUCTION:

5. Can prepare clear text on a range of subjects, which uses standard conventions, and is relatively easy to follow.

Letters:

5. Can write personal letters asking for, giving and responding to news. Can draft short, simple formal letters giving factual information related to her job, referring to enclosures.

Reports:

5. Can write detailed descriptions and narratives on a range of subjects. Can write a short essay or a short report supporting visual data.

Presentations:

5. Can give a clear, rehearsed talk presenting a viewpoint, product or place, and answering more predictable questions related to the content.

About the Authors

Rolf Schärer is Director-General of the Foundation for European Language and Educational Centres (Eurocentres), based in Zürich. The Eurocentre Foundation teaches English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Japanese in the countries in which they are spoken. The Foundation now has twenty-six centers, of which sixteen are permanent year-round operations, including one at Alexandria, Virginia. There are also close links to Michigan State University and Columbia University in New York. Eurocentres has been closely involved in the Council of Europe Modern Language projects since their initiation following a symposium at Rüschlikon, Switzerland coordinated by Eurocentres in 1971. The Foundation has consultative status with the Council of Europe, and Rolf Schärer is a member of the Modern Languages Expert Group.

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